

National Runaway Safeline 2015 Crisis Connection Trend Report Fact Sheet



The National Runaway Safeline (NRS) makes more than 250,000 connections to help and hope through its hotline, online, and offline services. The “National Trends on Youth in Crisis in the United States” report is an analysis of trends in connections to its 1-800-RUNAWAY hotline and 1800RUNAWAY.org online services when NRS specifically provided crisis intervention services. In 2014, NRS handled 15,319 hotline crisis connections and 2,434 crisis chat connections for a total of 17,753 crisis connections.

The report summarizes the types of individuals in crisis and the key characteristics associated with why they contacted NRS for help through its hotline and online services in 2014. In addition, this report places those numbers in context by comparing them to individual types and characteristics from the previous year (2013), three years ago (2011) and 10 years ago (2004). These two perspectives – the current picture of individuals in crisis and the trends in characteristics of these connections – give a nuanced understanding of the youth that NRS assists through its programs.

Key Findings

Status of Youth in Crisis (*NRS defines youth as young people up to 21-years-old; NRS serves individuals up to 24 years of age*)

- Youth in crisis who have not yet run away from home made up the largest group of crisis calls and online chats to NRS in 2014 at 30 percent, followed by runaways (27 percent) and those contemplating running away (24 percent). NRS was also contacted by homeless youth (13 percent), throwaway youth (5 percent), and suspected missing youth (1 percent).
- Many more youth who are contemplating running away are connecting to NRS now than in the past – a 20 percent increase over the past year and a 54 percent increase over the past three years. Another sign that NRS is helping more youth before they run is that it handles a similar amount of crisis connections year to year, but the number of youth who have run away and connected with NRS has decreased 12 percent over the past year, 23 percent over the past three years and 73 percent over the past decade.
- Connections from homeless youth were on an upward trend, with 16 percent over the last three years and 65 percent over the last decade. Although there has been a small decrease (12 percent) in connections from that group over the past year, this is still a large group of youth in crisis that NRS is focused on helping to stay safe and off the street.

Age of Youth in Crisis

- The largest group of youth in crisis who contacted NRS in 2014 was age 17 at 28 percent. Age 16 (17 percent), age 18 (12 percent) and ages 15 and 19 (10 percent) were the next largest groups.
- Over the past year, NRS saw an increase in crisis connections from youth up to age 17 and a decrease in crisis connections from youth ages 18-21. However, this past year’s trend in age counters the long-term shift, which has been a significant increase in crisis connections from youth ages 17-21.

Means of Survival for Youth in Crisis

- Three out of four (75 percent) youth in crisis connecting to NRS in 2014 relied on friends or relatives for survival resources including housing, food, and funds. Eleven percent reported using shelters/soup kitchens as their means of survival.
- More youth in crisis are using employment to support themselves than in the past, an increase of 4 percent over the past year and 9 percent over the past three years.
- There have also been small increases in the number of youth in crisis who state they are relying on the sex industry to survive.

Length of Time on the Street for Youth in Crisis Before Contacting NRS

- Just over half (51 percent) of youth in crisis connecting to NRS have been on the street for one week or less. Others have been on the street for one to four weeks (17 percent), one to two months (11 percent), two to six months (8 percent), six months to a year (7 percent) and one year or more (6 percent).
- In the past year, the biggest drop in connections, 24 percent, came from those on the street for one to four weeks.

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- Over the past three years, those on the streets for six months or more had the largest decrease in connections to NRS at 91 percent.

Whereabouts at Time of Contact for Youth in Crisis

- At 47 percent, home is the most common location from which youth reach out to NRS, but many (20 percent) also reach out when with a friend.
- There has been an increase in connections from youth at home, with a rise of 8 percent over the past year and 43 percent over the past three years.
- There have been smaller, but still significant, increases in connections from youth at school, with a 1 percent increase over the past year and 12 percent over the past three years.

Issues Raised by Youth in Crisis

- On average, three issues are raised during each crisis connection.
- Family dynamics (30 percent) remains the most commonly raised issue for youth in crisis connecting to NRS in 2014, followed by physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse and neglect (16 percent).
- Other issues reported in 2014 include peer and social problems (9 percent), economics (8 percent), and mental health (8 percent) among others.
- Connections about abuse and neglect are also increasing, with a rise of 6 percent over the past year, 19 percent over the past three years, and 21 percent over the past 10 years.
- The number of youth wanting to discuss economic issues was on the upswing over the past three years (14 percent) and 10 years (56 percent) but this issue was not raised as frequently in the past year (down 9 percent).
- GLBTQ issues have increased 20 percent over the past three years. To better support this group, NRS has focused outreach efforts to GLBTQ youth with targeted informational materials.

Relationship to Youth in Crisis

- Most 2014 crisis connections to NRS come from the youth who is in crisis at 62 percent.
- Other people who care about a youth in crisis also connect to NRS, including parents (17 percent), other adults (7 percent), relatives (6 percent), friends (5 percent) and agencies (2 percent).
- Fewer parents have connected with NRS about their youth, with a drop of 15 percent in the past year, 27 percent over the past three years, and 96 percent over the last decade.
- In contrast, connections from friends and agencies have both increased consistently over the past decade.

Gender of Youth in Crisis

- Females still make up the majority of individuals in crisis connecting with NRS at 70 percent.
- But, connections from males have been increasing faster than connections from females. Connections from males have increased 3 percent over the past year, 14 percent over the past three years, and 26 percent over the past decade.

The National Runaway Safeline (NRS), formerly known as the National Runaway Switchboard, established in 1971, serves as the federally designated national communication system for runaway, homeless and at-risk youth. NRS, with the support of more than 130 volunteers, makes more than 250,000 connections to help and hope through hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY), online (1800RUNAWAY.org), texting (66008) and offline resources. NRS provides crisis intervention, referrals to local resources, and education and prevention services to youth, families and community members throughout the country 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. More than 15,000 youth have been reunited with their families through NRS' Home Free program done in collaboration with Greyhound Lines, Inc. For more information, visit 1800RUNAWAY.org.

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